

Madison-Monroe-St Clair Unit

Below the Canopy

For Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists



April
2023



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Speakers Bureau Volunteers Needed

Looking for new volunteer opportunities? Enjoy sharing knowledge with others? Consider joining the Speakers Bureau. The office receives numerous requests throughout the year for presentations at garden clubs and other organizations. Extension Educators have created slides and scripts, so you don't have to research and create your own presentations. Volunteers are ready to train and support new volunteers. Contact Sarah to learn more.

Eckert's Dine and Shop Fundraiser

Dine at the restaurant or shop the general store and garden center at Eckert's in Belleville on Tuesday, May 9. A percentage of your purchases will be donated to St. Clair County Extension and Education Foundation. Be sure to mention when you pay that you are there for Extension if you forget to take your flyer.

Garden Tour Info

The Garden Tour committees have been working hard to prepare for the June events. Sign up sheets to assist at the gardens will be available soon.

Gardens in Bloom—June 2 and 3 in O'Fallon/Shiloh

Donations are also needed for the Gardeners Market on Saturday June 3. We will resell garden tools, containers, yard art, book, and other garden related items. Donations can be delivered to the Extension office before May 26 or brought to the Gardeners Market at St. Michael's Church in O'Fallon on June 3 before 8 a.m. The Gardeners Market will also include a plant sale. Jumping worms are still a concern in Illinois. If you are going to divide plants, please following the [guidelines](#) to reduce the spread of jumping worms. Proceeds from the event benefit St. Clair Foundation.

Madison County Garden Tour—June 23 and 24 in Maryville/Glen Carbon.

The event includes a container raffle. Container donations are appreciated from projects or individuals. We welcome a variety of container themes. Previous years have included sun, shade, succulents, and pollinator friendly. Please contact Sarah if you will contribute a container. Proceeds from the event benefit Madison Foundation.

Naturalist Phenology for April 2023

Bill Klunk and Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalists

During this month, be on the lookout for:

- ⇒ House wren (*Troglodytes aedon*) returning to our region in late April from their winter homes in the southern US and Mexico.
- ⇒ Spring ephemeral wild flowers such as: Eastern spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), Common bleeding heart (*Lamprocapnos spectabilis*) and Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*) blooming.
- ⇒ Venus and Mercury are bright in the western sky after sunset this month
- ⇒ April 22: The Lyrid meteor shower peaks in the early-morning hours averaging 15-20 meteors per hour.

Continuing Education Programs

WEBINARS

Extension Forestry Spring Webinar Series

Register to participate online [here](#).

- April 12 at 2 p.m.—Identification of Illinois' Native Oak Species
- April 26 at 2 p.m.—Invasive Species of Illinois' Rivers, Lakes, and Wetlands
- May 3 at 2 p.m.—Introduction to Tree Physiology
- May 10 at 2 p.m.—Forests, Moths, Birds, and Bats, Oh My!

Everyday Environment Series

Register to participate online [here](#).

- April 13 at 1 p.m.—Reducing Flooding & Water Pollution with Rain Gardens and Native Plants
- June 8 at 1 p.m.—Flatwater Kayaking

Master Naturalist Continuing Education Series

This Isn't Your Grandparents Weather

April 19 at 6 p.m.

Join Duane Friend as he discusses weather trends for the past 30 years, how it's affecting plants, animals and other parts of nature, what the next few decades may bring, on line climate resources to help make decisions on things like planting, outdoor recreation, etc. There are some volunteer activities that interested MN's can do to help provide data on local weather events. Registration is available at <https://go.illinois.edu/weathertrends>

IN PERSON or WEBINAR

Four Season Webinar Series

Register to participate online [here](#).

The program is also available at both offices. Call or email ruth1@illinois.edu to reserve a spot.

- April 25 at 1:30 p.m.—Natives: Sequence of Bloom
- May 16 at 1:30 p.m.—Invasive Plants-Beyond What's Outlawed

IN PERSON

Severe Weather! Past, Present, and Future

April 21 from 10 to 11 a.m. at Collinsville office

Join Dr. Alan Black with the SIUE Department of Geography & Geographic Information Sciences for a look at severe weather patterns for our area. There is a \$5 fee for the program that you can pay at the door. Space is limited. Call 618-344-4230 or email Sarah to RSVP.

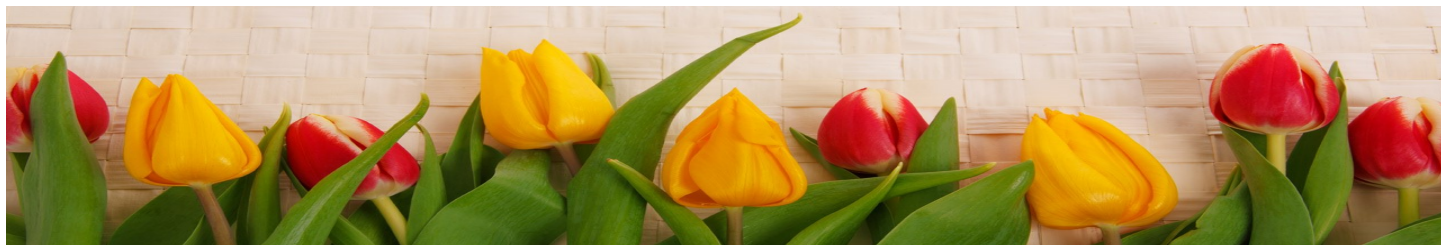
Commercial Fruit and Vegetable Tour

May 9 from 9 to 10:30 a.m. at Eckert's, Belleville

Join Elizabeth Wahle and Eckert's staff for a behind the scenes look at Eckert's fruit and vegetable production. Learn how commercial growers troubleshoot production issues on a large scale at their Belleville farm, 951 S Green Mount Rd, Belleville, IL. RSVP by May 5 to 618-344-4230 or email Sarah.

Check out the Unit Webpage for the most up to date info.

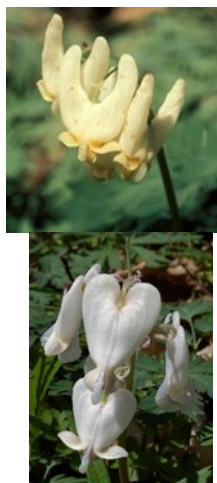
<https://extension.illinois.edu/mms>



University of Illinois • U.S. Department of Agriculture • Local Extension Councils Cooperating
University of Illinois Extension provides equal opportunities in programs and employment.

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in the program, please contact the Madison-Monroe-St. Clair Unit.
Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time for meeting your access needs.

Wondering While Wandering
Naturalist Ponderings for April 2023
Elizabeth Frisbie, Master Naturalist



This time of the year is one of my favorites with warmer, breezy weather and wildflowers popping up everywhere. As a woods dweller, I am treated to those spring ephemerals which prefer shade or dappled sunlight such as Dutchman's breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), Common bleeding heart (*Lamprocapnos spectabilis*), and Squirrel corn (*Dicentra canadensis*) on my property. Of these three, Dutchman's breeches and Squirrel corn are closely related and in early spring, prior to their flowering, it can be a challenge to distinguish them as their lacy, fern-like foliage is quite similar, looking nearly identical. Once they flower, however, it becomes easy since although both plants feature white flowers hanging from a raceme above the leaves, Dutchman's breeches do indeed resemble little pants hanging on a line whereas Squirrel corn has more of a heart-shaped (or some say a hat-shaped) flower. (Look for Squirrel corn to bloom about one week after Dutchman's breeches do, remembering that in Illinois, Dutchman's breeches are the more common plant.) Thinking about how well-suited the common name "breeches" is to the former plant's pantaloons-like flowers, made me wonder why Squirrel corn is called that since it neither resembles a squirrel nor corn. Likewise, I wonder why the critters who share my land do not bother either Dutchman's breeches or Squirrel corn when they quite willingly munch the nuts, seeds, fruits, and leaves of other plants on my property.

It turns out that Squirrel corn's common name comes not from its flower or leaves, but rather from its structures that lie beneath the soil out of our sight. Specifically, the plant's root system consists of both fibrous roots and clusters of yellow globoid corms, food storage structures, which resemble yellow corn kernels. As for the "squirrel" element, apparently Squirrel, along with Chipmunk and Mice, often dig up the roots of the Squirrel corn plant and transport the corms to other locations. Thus, Squirrels and other small mammals are often responsible for spreading this plant as their actions exactly follow gardening websites' instructions for propagation which note that Squirrel corn is "best propagated by digging up and dividing the tuberous roots and small kernel-like corms attached to the roots."¹ In addition to small mammals assisting by dividing and re-locating the corms, Squirrel corn is also spread by Ants who disperse the seed. The seeds of both Dutchman's breeches and Squirrel corn have elaiosome, a highly nutritious fatty substance, attached to them. Ants are attracted to the elaiosome and thus carry the seeds back to their homes where they eat the elaiosome and discard the seed, which effectively plants it in a new location. With regard to pollination, queen Bumble bees (*Bombus* spp.) are Squirrel corn's main pollinator. Other Bees also feed on the plant's nectar by perforating the flower's spurs in order to more easily reach the nectar within.



Although Squirrel corn is a good source of nectar and pollen for Bees in early spring, overall it has low food value to the wildlife who share its ecosystem. While walking in a well-established woods in April and early May, one might observe that Common bleeding heart, Dutchman's breeches and Squirrel corn plants are growing well, even in areas that are otherwise heavily browsed by White-tail deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*). Wild mammals have learned to avoid grazing on these plants because all three are toxic. They contain isoquinoline, a neurotoxic alkaloid that can cause neurological symptoms if ingested in large quantities. Additionally, exposure to the foliage or sap can cause temporary skin irritation. Although some herbalists and Native American tribes utilize the dried tubers medicinally as a diuretic and to treat syphilis, it must be noted that the plants are just as toxic to Humans as they are to other mammals. As one naturalist noted, the fact Deer and Rabbits avoid grazing on toxic Squirrel corn and Dutchman's breeches makes these plants "great garden candidates, but a bad addition to your salad."² Beyond their medicinal purposes, Squirrel corn plants are utilized in several ways. Holistic healers who use flower essences believe Squirrel corn helps to restore emotional expressiveness by healing the grief and pain held in the heart's memory. Association with the human heart was also involved in Native American's traditional use of Squirrel corn. For instance, the Menominee used it as a love charm. A young man would cause his intended to follow him forever by either throwing the flowers to his intended or by chewing the roots and blowing the perfumed smell into the woman's face. The Onondaga used the plant, which they referred to as "Ghost Corn," to provide food for the spirits during ceremonies. Although Squirrel corn is not of high food value to mammals, its presence in Illinois woodlands is viewed by ecologists as a good sign as it is only found in high quality woodlands where native ground flora remains intact. Sadly, Squirrel corn is one of the spring wildflowers threatened by invasives like Amur Honey-suckle (*Lonicera maackii*) and Garlic Mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*). In fact, in Minnesota Squirrel corn was officially classified as a special concern species in 1984 due to decreasing numbers caused by habitat loss and non-native species invasion. Thus, our continued work to eradicate non-native species here in Illinois is essential if we want to enjoy Squirrel corn and other native plants in the future.

References: www.cornellbotanicgardens.org¹; Great Lakes Sacred Essences; Holland, M. (2019) "Squirrel Corn vs. Dutchman's Breeches" in *Naturally Curious - New Edition A Photographic Field Guide and Month-By-Month Journey Through the Fields, Woods, and Marshes of New England* (Trafalgar Square Books); kentuckynativeplantandwildlife.blogspot.com ("Plant of the Week: Squirrel Corn: Monday, March 4, 2013")²; Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center; Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; Native Plant Trust; www.the-natural-web.org; www.naturalmedicinalherbs.net; www.plantitwild.com; The Spruce; www.virginiawildflowers.org; www.wildflowersillinois.com

Welcome to My Jungle

Dr. Elizabeth Wahle, Extension Educator

Know your garden and choose plants wisely

Looking through garden plant images often leads me to reminisce about the plants no longer in my garden and what each death has taught me. Many plant species have died at my hands after being planted in unsuitable conditions because my desire to have them overrode some very real limitations in my garden. Take for instance the blue poppy (*Meconopsis spp.*). They thrive in moist filtered shade where the summers are not too hot. Why would I ever think I would be successful? It was their unusual color and beauty that made me tempt fate...and reality. My garden is hot and dry, so it was a quick and painful death. As a result, I made a rule for myself "kill three, you're out." You might ask, why three? Was once not enough? For the blue poppy, once was enough; there was no chance it would grow anywhere in my garden, and I should have accepted that from the beginning. But for something like Indian pinks (*Spigelia marilandica*), it can be tricky to find the right spot, but easy to establish if you do. It has made my kill list because I chose a site unwisely on occasion, yet I have several well-established plants in sites where I got it right. If I had killed three in a row without success, I would have stopped there.

Perennial does not always mean long lived

What is harder to get a handle on is the differing longevities of herbaceous perennials. Like dogs, some species are just longer lived than others. Perennial traditionally implies a plant that lives for three or more years, but many gardeners extend that definition or expectation to living a lifetime, effectively forever. Unfortunately, most of our herbaceous garden perennials don't have the historically long life of the giant sequoia (*Sequoiadendron giganteum*), though some like peony (*Paeonia spp.*) are considered long lived and can survive a hundred plus years if provided the right growing conditions. Most gardeners find out the hard way not all perennials are long lived, when after a relatively short period of time the species unexpectedly disappears from the garden. Several notoriously short-lived perennials like blue vervain (*Verbena hastata*) and cardinal flower (*Lobelia cardinalis*) can trick you into thinking they are longer lived through successful reseeding but take away the optimal growing conditions and/or disturb reseeding (raking or other soil disturbance around the plant that buried the seed too deeply) and they can disappear from the garden in as little as a year. Cardinal flower easily made my kill list three times just because I don't have the consistently moist soils it prefers, nor are conditions good for successful reseeding. So, for me, cardinal flower would be a relatively expensive, but stunningly beautiful annual if I so chose to keep it in my garden.

Long lived perennials come back year after year

If you have ever driven past the site of an old farm site, often long-lived herbaceous perennials like iris (*Iris spp.*), peony, and daffodil (*Narcissus spp.*) continue to come up long after the house and barns are gone. I tend to favor long-lived plants just through natural work selection pressure. Plants that come back year after year require less work from me in terms of
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The blue poppy is not suited to a hot climate but thrives in a partly shady spot where summers aren't too hot.



Herbaceous peonies have a well-deserved reputation for being very long-lived.



Cardinal flower is notoriously short lived if not provided with consistent, uniformly moist soils.

replanting. Those perennials that effectively act like annuals or biennials in my garden usually make it to my kill list three times rather quickly. And without any obvious long-term success like with Indian pinks, they stop being replanted because I have other things I choose to prioritize for time in the garden, like planting other long-lived perennials.

Long-lived perennials are great for building a collection

If I were asked which cultivar in my daffodil collection is my most favorite, this year I would have to pick 'Sunnyside Up.' It sports large blooms on stout stems that do not lodge over in wind and rain, and it puts on a display that attracts attention from a distance. Though it might look somewhat like a double daffodil, 'Sunnyside Up' is designated as a split-cupped daffodil following the Royal Horticultural Society's daffodil classification system. Split-cupped collar daffodils are sometimes called butterfly daffodils because the split sections of the cup (corolla) fold back against the tepals (petals and sepals look the same), reminiscent of spread butterfly wings.



'Sunnyside Up' is a standard mid-season split-cupped collar daffodil.

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